

Dear exhibitors, dear visitors,
dear friends and partners of spoga+gafa,
dear colleagues,

Fantastic exhibitor feedback, visitor figures up once again and thus the announcement of the fifth record spoga+gafa in a row. That might well have been probably yesterday, on the third and last day of spoga+gafa 2020; if the world had continued to turn "old-normal". But it wasn't to be. The circumstances leading up to the cancellation are known and have been sufficiently discussed. We were prepared, Cologne was ready, and so were many of our exhibitors and visitors.

Today, in early September – and thus in the time that we talked about again and again and made prognoses about during the weeks and months leading up to the cancellation on 6 July – we ask ourselves what would have happened. Would we have had a chance of success, had you been prepared to travel? How many visitors and exhibitors would have come? Conversations with colleagues from other countries – countries in which trade fairs have long been taking place again – have informed us that those events that have taken place have done so successfully for many parties and have all exceeded expectations in terms of their results. The follow-up meetings were concerned less with the quantity than with the quality of those attending, the business that was done and the efficiency of the discussions. The decision-makers for product range, procurement and product came together in a way that exceeded expectations, which makes us glad for those involved and confirms us in our belief that trade fairs are possible, not only in the future but also right now. They are possible when we all come to the dance with the right expectations, for now as then, quality has priority over quantity.

Nonetheless, we still believe that the decision to cancel the 2020 trade fair was correct. We want to say thank you for the feedback, both internal and external, that we received on our way to taking that decision and afterwards, and we are very grateful for it. If the hundreds of discussions held in the last months have accomplished one thing, it's the mutual trust between us to act as equal partners. We are considering the needs of our green garden lifestyle sector even more than previously in our actions. The discussions that we have held concerning the status, the opportunities for the future and the interests of our exhibitors and visitors from across the segments have brought us to the conclusion that spoga+gafa should now be permanently held at the end of the first half of the year.

The talks and scenarios of recent months and years have shown that June offers a significantly large overlap of the changing needs of suppliers and their target retail market. We have clearly seen that the new date has been well received. The reorientation offers opportunities for everyone, and no one will find it impossible. September has strengths, but June repeats and changes them. In past years the participants often focused on the targets brand building, networking and PR alongside the presentation of products, and these special benefits of spoga+gafa are also available in June. The new date also offers many of the trade fair's partners the opportunity to present their products to the trade at an earlier point in time. The feedback we are receiving from exhibitors and visitors alike shows that both those customers addressing large-scale retailers and those targeting the specialist trade see outstanding opportunities in the June date. Here we would like to once more make the point that next year's date at the end of May is a one-time exception. In subsequent years, as far as our trade fair schedule permits, the event will be held in the middle or at the end of June. The discussions that we held prior to the announcement with the respective branches of the specialist trade – be they the furniture customers or, for example, those active in the barbecue segment – have shown that people can live with coming to Cologne as early as the end of May one

time. Of course the dates for the following years, in the middle or at the end of June, will subsequently be preferable for our partners.

As far as the exhibitors are concerned, we should not deceive ourselves. Some of our partners will not find it easy to adjust their accustomed product cycle slightly to the new trade fair dates in the first year and to have their products ready for presentation a good two months earlier. The companies affected, however, have made clear in the dialogues concerning the basics of the desired rescheduling that they see the change as manageable and thus regard the early date as the best that could be chosen. If we look at the rebooking numbers, it is clear that all of the halls are not only reacquiring the previous exhibitors but also attracting a significant number of registrations from companies that have not participated in recent years. This is the case for the barbecue and decoration sectors, for example, for Hall 6 with our technology and equipment customers and also, in particular, for the furniture sector. Consequently, in all of our exhibition halls, our motto is "Together, through one May and then happy in June".

Dear companions of spoga+gafa, yesterday we could not drink a glass of Kölsch beer together at your stand or at one of our parties. But we'll do it again soon. At the biggest garden lifestyle trade fair in the world. In Cologne. We promise.

Until then, we send you our greetings and wish you all the best in meeting the current challenges.

Catja Caspary, Stefan Lohrberg and the spoga+gafa team